



**Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice**  
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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **OJJ Presents 2012 Champion of Louisiana Juvenile Justice Award**



Baton Rouge, LA – The Office of Juvenile Justice today presented its 2012 Champion of Louisiana Juvenile Justice Award at the annual Celebration of Change at Jetson Center for Youth.

**Debra K. DePrato, M.D., is the 2012 Champion of Louisiana Juvenile Justice**, awarded annually by the Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice to recognize people who have championed the cause of juvenile justice reform, and whose dedication and hard work have resulted in the systemic overhaul of juvenile justice in Louisiana.

The first annual Champion of Louisiana Juvenile Justice Award was presented in 2010 to Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Catherine “Kitty” Kimball. The 2011 Champion was Beauregard Parish District Attorney David W. Burton.

“Dr. Debra DePrato is truly a Champion of Louisiana juvenile justice,” said OJJ Deputy Secretary Dr. Mary L. Livers. “She has dedicated her entire career to improving medical and mental health care for the most vulnerable children in Louisiana. She has given of herself unselfishly, and her public service is boundless.”

A native of Ferriday, in Concordia Parish, Dr. Debra K. DePrato completed a fellowship in forensic psychiatry at Yale University, took her adult and child psychiatry residency training at Albert B. Chandler Medical Center in Lexington, Kentucky, and is a graduate of the LSU Health Sciences Center in Shreveport, LA and Louisiana Tech University in Ruston, LA. Dr. DePrato is also a graduate of Huntington High School in Ferriday.

“I always thought I wanted to be a pediatrician,” Dr. DePrato said. She was drawn to working with children. She tried a number of specialties during her internship, but it was spending time treating a youth at a hospital that brought her vocation into focus. “I spent several hours stitching him up and listening to his story,” Dr. DePrato said. “It came to me, that there was such a need, and I wanted to be a child psychiatrist.”

She went on to the University of Kentucky Psychiatry Department that combined pediatrics and child and adult psychiatry. “I realized that I could help children who were suffering right at the moment,” Dr. DePrato said. “I also realized that I could take my education even further with another specialty in forensic psychiatry from Yale University.” Today, she is board-certified in both adult and forensic psychiatry, and board-eligible child and adolescent psychiatry.

After completing her education in Kentucky and Connecticut, Dr. DePrato returned to Louisiana. She moved to New Orleans to join the faculty of the LSU School of Medicine’s Department of Psychiatry in 1992, and celebrated her 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with LSUHSC in September 2012. Today she serves as Director of the Institute for Public Health and Justice at LSUHSC in New Orleans, which performs research, education and outreach for behavioral health issues, including youth in the juvenile justice system. She is also an Associate Clinical Professor of Public Health, School of Public Health. She served as program director for the LSU Health Sciences Center Juvenile Justice Program for six years, revamping all medical, mental health and dental care in juvenile secure facilities.

“At that time there were over 2,000 youth incarcerated in five facilities,” she noted. “It was a challenge, but we all worked together, and things steadily improved over time. I was very proud of everyone who served; it truly took a team effort to transform the secure care system.”

Dr. DePrato concurrently served as program chair for the Section on Juvenile Justice for the LSU School of Public Health, where she developed educational experiences for public health students, including forensic clinical services, and development of academic research and publications in the area of juvenile justice and health care. Prior to this, she also founded the Division of Law and Psychiatry at LSU Medical Center and developed an accredited forensic residency program.

She was asked to be the project director of the John T. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation’s Louisiana *Models for Change* program, a multi-year (2006-2013), multi-million dollar project designed to identify and accelerate promising juvenile justice models for juvenile justice system reform.

Dr. DePrato has since developed the Institute for Public Health and Justice at LSUHSC, which now administers Louisiana *Models for Change*. The Institute is a research, education, and outreach initiative for behavioral health issues, including youth in the justice system. Key areas include development of evidence-based practices, technical assistance in developing and evaluating model programming, and education and training of court professionals and forensic consultation.

Dr. DePrato’s psychiatric clinical experience includes child and adult inpatient and outpatient psychiatric care, and forensic psychiatric hospitals, jails and prisons. She has served as an

expert mental health witness in forensic and child psychiatry for the U. S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, several states and in federal court, and civil, criminal and juvenile courts.

Dr. DePrato received the 2005 “Exemplary Psychiatrist Award” from the National Association of Mental Illness (NAMI). She is a Distinguished Fellow in the American Psychiatric Association (APA), and has served on its Psychiatry and the Law Council. She is also a member of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, and the Louisiana Psychiatric Medical Association, and has served in several committees for both associations. Dr. DePrato has served as an Advisory Board Member to the National Institute of Drug Abuse, and is currently an appointee to the Louisiana Governor’s Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Board.

Dr. DePrato’s extensive educational background and personal connections have served her well. “I am from central Louisiana, I was educated in north Louisiana and I live in south Louisiana,” she said. “I’ve been fortunate to establish relationships statewide that have been of benefit in our collaborative work to better the lives of Louisiana’s children. I respect and admire the people that we work with, all over the state. It has been very rewarding to be a part of juvenile justice reform, and to see consensus-building among stakeholders when everyone is together in the same room - it takes people from all disciplines to make it work – for the children and our communities.”

Another positive accomplishment highlighted at the event was Harvard University’s recent recognition of an innovative OJJ program, Service Coordination, as a “Bright Idea,” in its Innovations in American Government Awards program. Service Coordination is an important component of OJJ’s systemic reform. It provides consistent, individualized case management and oversight of all cases, and allows the agency to provide better service to youth in its care and their families.

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